



## Klamath Network Featured Creature

### September 2011

#### Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*)

##### **General Description:**

The Gray Jay, also known as the Grey Jay, Canada Jay, or Whiskey Jack, is a member of the crow and jay family (Corvidae). It is sometimes confused with its larger monochromatic cousin, the Clark's Nutcracker. The smaller Gray Jay has a much smaller bill and more muted colors. It is one of three members of the genus *Perisoreus*, the others being the Siberian Jay, *P. infaustus*, found from Norway to eastern Russia and the Sichuan Jay, *P. internigrans*, restricted to the mountains of eastern Tibet and northwestern Sichuan.

##### **Ecology and Distribution:**

Gray Jays store food and live year-round on permanent territories in coniferous forests. They are adaptable, however, and move downslope in winter to forage in lower elevation forests. They also adapt well to human activities and the food sources and habitat heterogeneity they often create.

The Gray Jay is found in boreal forests across North America and extending southward into the mountain forests of the Rocky Mountains to New Mexico and Arizona and in the Pacific Ranges as far south as the Klamath Mountains of northern California. A southern disjunct population occurs in the highlands in and around Lassen Volcanic National Park.

##### **Reproduction:**

Breeding is in late spring to early summer, depending upon elevation. The nest cup is made of plant material and typically 1.5-10 m high in a conifer tree. A average clutch has 3 eggs and is incubated in 16-18 days by the female. The young fledge after approximately 14 days.

##### **Interesting Fact:**

Murray et al. (2005) documented the first recorded instance of Gray Jay predation on long-toed salamander larvae in shallow ponds at Crater Lake National Park.



**Photo Credit:** Mike Dunn



**Range Map:** Cornell Lab of Ornithology

##### **Behavior:**

Perhaps less cheeky than their larger cousins, the raucous Steller's Jay and Clark's Nutcracker, Gray Jays are nonetheless bold. Gray Jays are frequent visitors to campgrounds and picnic areas, and will often grab a peanut or cheetoh from an unwary diner. A less flattering nickname for this species is the "camp robber."

##### **Feeding:**

Like other corvids, the Gray Jay is an omnivore, consuming a broad diet of plant and animal materials. In the warmer seasons, they dine opportunistically on insects, small mammals, eggs, nestlings of other bird species, and fruits and berries. Other year round foods include lichens, fungi, carrion, and conifer seeds. They also store caches of food in the foliage of conifers, which are held in place by their sticky saliva.

##### **Where to see it in the Network Parks:**

The Gray Jay is a denizen of coniferous forests at largely mid to high elevations, but may frequent lower elevation coastal conifer forests as well. It is a common resident of Crater Lake, Oregon Caves, Redwood, and Lassen Volcanic.

##### **More Information:**

Marshall et al. (Eds). 2003. In *Birds of Oregon: A General Reference*. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, Oregon.

Murray, M.P., C.A. Pearl, and R.B. Bury. 2005. Apparent predation by Gray Jays, *Perisoreus canadensis*, on Long-toed Salamanders, *Ambystoma macrodactylum*, in the Oregon Cascade Range. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 119(2):291-292.

Strickland, D., and H. Ouellet. 1993. Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 40 (A. Poole, P. Stettenheim, and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA; The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.